



Obituary

Edmund White

1945 - 2022



It was with great sadness that the Hillsborough bell ringers heard of the passing of Edmund White and sympathised with his wife Heather and daughter Lauren. For the past decade Edmund had been ill with Parkinson's Disease and had struggled up to the tower for short rings for as long as the condition allowed. Illness brought to an end a ringing career which stretched back to 1960 and robbed the ringers of a witty and reliable ringer.

Edmund's connection with bells actually began as a small child when his father was the sexton of Eglantine Parish Church outside Hillsborough. This church has a tiny chime of three bells hung in a bellcote and operated from what looks like a sentry box at the foot of the wall. Edmund and his father chimed these bells for service and so when the family moved into Hillsborough, learning to ring at St Malachy's seemed the next logical step. It was a great boost for the tower when Edmund, his father George, brother Alan and sister Margaret all began ringing. When, in the fullness of time, Edmund's daughter, Lauren, learned how to ring the White family had given Hillsborough three generations of ringers.

Edmund had a very observant and often cryptic sense of humour and for many years wrote articles in the Irish Bell News under the pseudonym of "Observer O'Hoolycan". His observations humorously captured the essence of Hillsborough ringing in the 1960s when the team comprised some rather "frayed" older ringers and new inexperienced ringers. Thus, Edmund's writings introduced us to the infrequent "clash-free round" or mused over the difference between bad striking and good clashing! He even commented that there was often more clipping than a barber's shop. When Hillsborough was augmented to ten, Edmund opined that the initial rounds on ten had the consistency of "wadding through cold porridge". This was the type of humour which at the time made the locals smile and still makes us smile in retrospect now that Edmund is gone.

Leaving Hillsborough in the late sixties to undertake theological training, Edmund continued his ringing in Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, and it was here he was taught the rudiments of change-ringing, which would be very useful to future teams in Hillsborough. Moving into the prison service, Edmund worked in HMP Feltham, and along with some other prison staff rang at St Catherine's in Feltham. This was shortly before the Victorian church building was demolished – except the tower – and the bells removed. Edmund was very interested to hear years later that the bells are still ringing in a new home in Guernsey.

Returning to Hillsborough and embarking on family life, Edmund threw himself afresh into ringing at St Malachy's and enthusiastically participated in new achievements. The tower had

traditionally been a call change tower but in the early 1990s the team worked hard to learn change-ringing. Although capable of more, Edmund loved to cover and so usually rang the tenor bell. Such was his covering skill that he was nicknamed “Steady Eddie”! He rang in numerous quarter peals and covered the first local quarter of triples and in 2003 rang the tenor to his only peal, which was Grandsire Doubles. Edmund rang the tenor to our competition teams which by the 1990s had abandoned (largely) the practise of “clash-free rounds” and he delighted in many wins, most particularly when we won the all-Ireland Murphy Cup for the first time. He also participated fully in the legendary celebrations which took place after this.

Edmund worked tirelessly for the tower as an unofficial public relations officer. He maintained the tower web site, keeping it up to date with his wry observations, and it attracted many ringers – old and new – to the tower.

Edmund was a big man and loved ringing big bells – his particular recollection was ringing the 82cwt tenor bell at Liverpool Cathedral. This had a poignancy for him, as his mother – who died when he was a teenager – came from the city. At Edmund’s funeral his grand-daughter commented that his family had always known how strong Edmund was physically, but it wasn’t until Parkinson’s Disease took its grip on him that they realised that he was stronger mentally. We saw this quiet acceptance and steely determination in the tower. With each setback, Edmund would be positive and tell us that if he couldn’t ring this week, he would endeavour to be there next week. And when he could, he made it up the stairs and rang. When this was no longer possible he said how much he missed his ringing.

Edmund died on 10th June and his funeral took place on the following Monday. Hillsborough tower was filled with a mixture of experienced ringers who had known Edmund a lifetime and new ringers who knew him only by reputation. We rang the bells open before and after the service with some of the best ringing we have had in a long time. Of recent times we have happily had an influx of new recruits and naturally there are times when the ringing is a bit unsteady. However, Edmund would have approved of our efforts and be pleased to see the tower so active. He frequently declared that in ringing the worst mistake was silence. Edmund always appreciated the history and continuity of ringing in Hillsborough and viewed himself – and us – as merely parts of a long thread. We won’t forget the contribution which he made to that thread. Simon Walker.